March/April 1995 Volume 20, Number 2

A summary of recent news stories from the University of California San Francisco

UCSF

To Our Neighbors

Creating safer computer keyboards

There has been a lot of talk about ergonomically sound keyboards but little research has been done to determine just what that means. The UC Ergonomics Laboratory is one of the few places in the country doing basic studies to support the creation of a truly ergonomic keyboard that won't harm its users, according to David Rempel, MD, MPH, director of the lab.

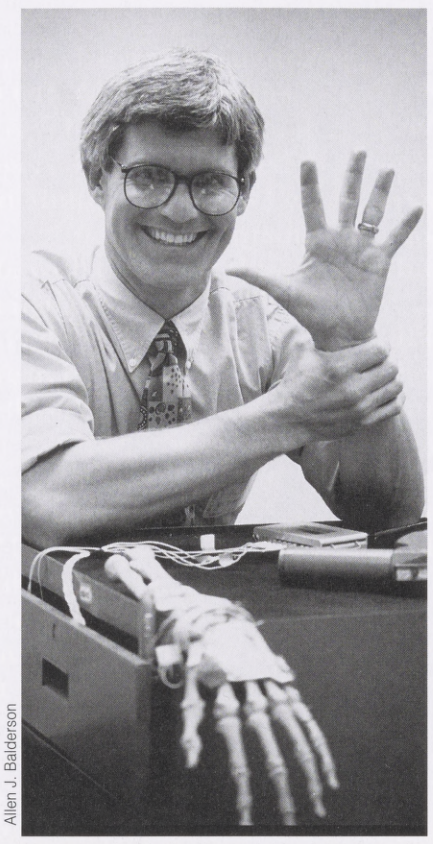
The work could affect more than 30 million Americans, including many children, who use keyboards regularly and are at risk of upper limb disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome, Rempel says. Carpal tunnel syndrome affects hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. and is one of the most common forms of occupational illness in the country today, he says.

The disorder is caused by stress on the median nerve, housed in a tiny channel in the hand and wrist. Sufferers may experience pain, loss of sensation and permanent loss of use of the hand.

Rempel says keyboard design features, such as hand position and the amount of force used in typing, may play a role in the development of carpal tunnel syndrome or tendonitis by affecting the pressure exerted on the median nerve. At the Ergonomics Lab, researchers are looking at possible changes in keyboard design that might help prevent injury.

The lab has just moved into expanded and remodeled quarters based in Richmond, CA, which are equipped with new high-tech equipment that can do precise analysis of hand motions during different activities.

In one project, researchers ask volunteers to type on an odd-looking keyboard that is split in half so that both sides can be rotated up and down or moved apart to form an inverted V. The keyboard is adjusted 10 different ways, with typists working for 20 minutes at a stretch on each configuration. The volunteers have a series of wires attached to their hands and wrists so their subtle movements can be recorded on a computer outside the research room.



Allen J. Balderson

Ergonomics Lab director David Rempel with one of the many instruments used to research stress on the hand and wrist

Cholesterol-lowering treatment for elderly — more harm than good?

Elderly people are being treated with cholesterol-lowering drugs despite the absence of evidence supporting the health benefits of such treatment, according to an editorial by UCSF physicians Stephen B. Hulley, MD, and Thomas B. Newman, MD, in the November 2 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association.*

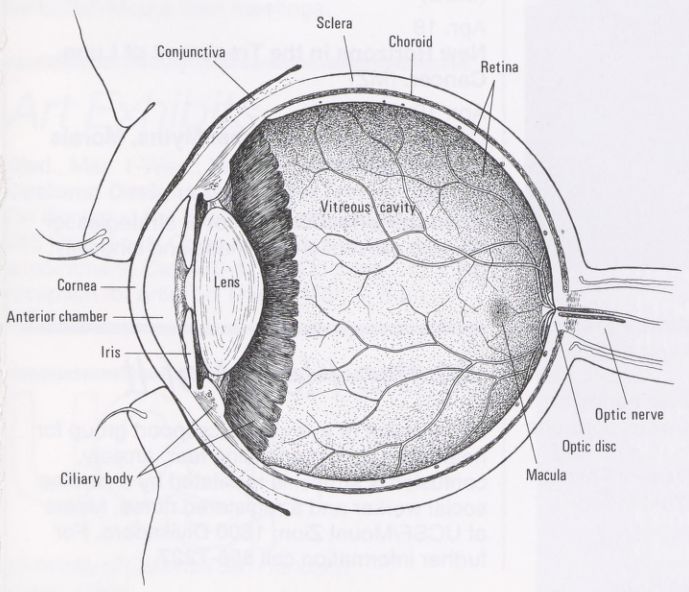
The *JAMA* editorial accompanies publication of an original research study by Harlan M. Krumholz and his colleagues at Yale, who report no association between cholesterol levels and coronary heart disease or death among a group of elderly people whose average age was 79 years.

Hulley and Newman cite the Krumholz study and a recent report from the Framingham Heart Study to support their claim that the correlation between cholesterol and heart disease weakens steadily with age, and completely disappears by about age 80. Thus, recommendations to treat high cholesterol in the elderly should differ from those for the middle-aged, they say.

"Elderly people in their late 70s and beyond should generally not be screened or treated for high blood cholesterol," the physicians say.

New retinal disease research center opens

A new Kearn Family Research Center for the Study of Retinal Degenerations, the first center of its kind in Northern California, has opened at the UCSF Beckman Vision Center.



Beckman Vision Center

The new center is devoted to the fight against blinding diseases of the retina, a layer of nerve cells at the back of the eye that turn light into signals transmitted to the brain, which in turn translates the signals into vision. Some 2.5 million Americans have some form of retinal degeneration, including macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over 60, and retinitis pigmentosa, an inherited disease that afflicts one in 3,500 people worldwide.

"The Kearn Center will not only significantly expand our research efforts on these diseases, but also will provide a state-of-the-art diagnostic clinic for patients with retinitis pigmentosa and macular degeneration," says Matthew LaVail, director of the center.

Some center researchers, for example, will study the interaction of retinal and optic nerve cells in tissue cultures. If they can sort out cues that tell these cells how to connect with the brain, the researchers hope they may be able to transplant normal retinal cells into a patient's damaged retina to restore vision.

The new Kearn Center was made possible by a generous donation from the Kearn family of Hillsborough to the RP Foundation Fighting Blindness, a national organization dedicated to the fight against retinitis pigmentosa and other blinding retinal disorders.

In Brief

Women's Health 2000, March 4

Find out the latest on women's health from the experts at the second annual Women's Health 2000 on Saturday, March 4. The day-long forum, co-sponsored by the Obstetrics and Gynecology Research Education Foundation and the UCSF Women's Resource Center, will be held from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Laurel Heights Conference Center.

UCSF faculty members will cover such topics as abnormal Pap smears, weight management, breast cancer, HIV and women, osteoporosis, pregnancy over 35, PMS, menopause and many more. Cost to attend the forum is $35. Pre-registration is required by calling 591-9004.

AIDS-wasting drug trial

UCSF researchers at SFGH are launching a clinical trial using the drug thalidomide as a potential therapy for AIDS-associated wasting. The drug, which recently has shown promise in treating a number of ailments, will be tested in up to 25 patients. Thalidomide is a relatively inexpensive oral agent that attacks the wasting syndrome by a different route than hormonal therapies, says Morris Schambelan, MD, principal investigator of the study. For further information, call Wendy Pagett at 206-3319.

Treating stomach pain

Ken McQuaid, MD, and David Kearney, MD, of the UCSF Division of Gastroenterology are looking for volunteers to participate in a study looking at a new way to treat stomach or abdominal symptoms. Persons with frequent indigestion, heartburn, upper abdominal pain or bloating may be eligible. Recently, doctors have found that some of these symptoms may actually be due to a bacteria that infects the lining of the stomach. It is possible that treatment with antibiotics may relieve some of these symptoms. For further information, call 750-2105.

Early intervention essential for sickle cell disease

One in every 400 African Americans suffers from sickle cell disease, an inherited condition that can be life-threatening. The disease also affects people from other ethnic groups, including Latinos and people of Mediterranean descent. Early intervention is critical to a better quality of life for the child with the disease. The Northern Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center offers free testing, counseling education, clinical care, research and referrals. For further information, call 206-5169.

Osteoporosis prevention

UCSF and VAMC researchers are seeking healthy men 65 and older for a study on preventing senile osteoporosis, a dangerous thinning of the bones that can afflict men and women as they age. Participants will receive treatment with a hormone that preliminary studies suggest might help stop bone loss and prevent senile osteoporosis. Volunteers will spend up to 28 days residing at UCSF. For further information, call 750-6928.

More news for you

on the back page

What's happening

To Our Neighbors
March/April 1995
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events at UC San

Special Events

Sat., Mar. 4
Women's Health 2000. Forum on women's health issues. $35. UCSF/Laurel Heights Conf. Cntr., 3333 California. Call 591-9004. (See story on front page.)

Tues., Mar. 7
Acculturation and Alcoholism in Latino Communities. Sponsored by UCSF Hispanic Nurses Association and the UCSF School of Nursing's Faculty-Mentor Group. Rm. 721, Nursing Bldg., enter through 521 Parnassus. Noon-1:30 p.m. Call 476-1805.

Sat., Mar. 11
UCSF Orchestra Concert. Features works by William Grant Still and Felix Mendelssohn. Co-sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. $5/7/10. Millberry Gym, 500 Parnassus. 8 p.m. Call 476-6761.

Sun., Mar. 12
UCSF Orchestra Children's Concert. Kids meet musicians and their instruments at the post-concert Musical Instrument Petting Zoo. Co-sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. Millberry Gym, 500 Parnassus. 11 a.m. Call 476-6761.

Sat., Mar. 18
Stroke & Stroke Prevention. 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Call 750-4109 for reservations. (See story on back page.)

Mon., Mar. 27
Reinventing Public Health. Philip R. Lee, Asst. Secretary for Health, Dept. of Health and Human Services, speaks at this program to acknowledge the establishment of the Caldwell B. Esselstyn Chair in Health Policy at the UCSF Institute for Health Policy Studies. 3 p.m. Call 476-0531 for location.

Fri., Apr. 28
The Vocal Chords Spring Concert. Student a cappella choir. Co-sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. Millberry Conference Center, 500 Parnassus. 8 p.m. Call 476-6761.

Sat., Apr. 29
March of Dimes 1995 Silver Anniversary WalkAmerica. 10K walk to raise funds to help prevent birth defects and infant mortality. To join the UCSF team sponsored by Public Service Programs, call 476-4394. Sharon Meadow, Golden Gate Park. Registration: 8 a.m. Walk begins: 8:45 a.m.

Cancer Referral Hotline

The UCSF Cancer Referral Service enables cancer patients to place just one telephone call and learn the names of UCSF doctors specializing in the kind of treatment they need. Call 1-800/888-8664.

Breast Cancer Screening

Women can have low-cost mammograms — X-rays to screen for breast cancer — from a mobile van that travels to convenient Bay Area locations. The procedure takes approximately 20 minutes and costs $65. Your physician's approval is required, plus his/her full name, address & telephone number to assure results are mailed promptly. Appointments must be made at least one month to six weeks in advance. Find out when the van will be in your neighborhood by calling 476-2193 between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Monday through Friday. A $65 mammography screening also is available at the UCSF/Mount Zion Medical Center Radiology Department. Call 885-7465.

Campus Tours

All tours are free and begin at 1 p.m. on Fridays. Meet in the Medical Sciences Bldg. lobby, 513 Parnassus. Sponsored by Public Service Programs. Call 476-4394.

Women's History Month Events

Co-sponsored by the Women's Resource Center and those listed below. Call 476-5222.

Wed., Mar. 1
Totally Fearless — The Life of Dolores Huerta: An Intimate Account from One of California's Strongest Labor Organizers. A Brown Bag lecture co-sponsored by Public Service Programs. Rm. 300, Health Sciences West, enter through 513 Parnassus. Noon.

Wed., Mar. 8
Poetry Reading. Readings by Bay Area and UCSF women poets. Toland Hall, 533 Parnassus. Noon-2 p.m.

Thurs., Mar. 16
Women's Health Issues for the Prime Time. Learn about sexuality, heart disease, breast cancer and menopause. A Brown Bag lecture co-sponsored by Public Service Programs. Rm. 125, Mission Cntr. Bldg., 1855 Folsom. Noon.

Tues., Mar. 21
Why Doesn't She Leave? Learn how society perpetuates domestic violence and what health care professionals can do to help. A Brown Bag lecture co-sponsored by Public Service Programs. Herbst Hall, UCSF/Mount Zion, 1600 Divisadero. Noon.

Wed., Mar. 29
The Clothesline Project. An interactive display to commemorate women survivors or victims of rape or domestic violence. Lobby, Medical Sciences Bldg., 513 Parnassus.

Surviving Violence. Panel discussion featuring survivors of sexual violence, incest, child abuse or hate crimes. Cole Hall, 513 Parnassus. Noon-1 p.m.

Coping with Eating Disorders. Co-sponsored by Women's Health Access. Toland Hall, 533 Parnassus. 6-7 p.m.

Thurs., Mar. 30
for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf. Lorraine Hansberry Theater, 500 Sutter St. $18. 8 p.m. Call 476-5222 for tickets.

Fri., Mar. 31
All About Eve. Women and girls see this Bette Davis movie for 67 cents, while men and boys pay $1 to reflect the fact that women still earn only 67 cents for every dollar a man earns. Cole Hall Cinema event co-sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. Cole Hall, 513 Parnassus. 6:30 p.m.

Recreation & Fitness

Whether your goals are to lose weight, decrease stress or just have more fun, Millberry Fitness Center has the program you need. Registration for spring classes begins **Mon., Apr. 3.** Call 476-1115 for a complete class schedule.

Mon., Apr. 3
Children's Summer Theater Day Camp Registration. Parents may begin to register their children ages 9-14 for this day camp where kids learn to create original theatrical productions with members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Two sessions begin Mon., Aug. 7. Sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. Register at Millberry Fitness Center, 500 Parnassus. Call 476-6761.

Primary Care Hotline

Do you need help choosing a primary care physician at the UCSF Medical Center? Get personalized assistance to help you make a choice to suit your personal preferences and geographic needs. Physicians are available at UCSF Medical Center, UCSF/Mount Zion and the practices at Lakeshore and Daly City. Call 885-7777 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

UCSF/Mount Zion Care Account

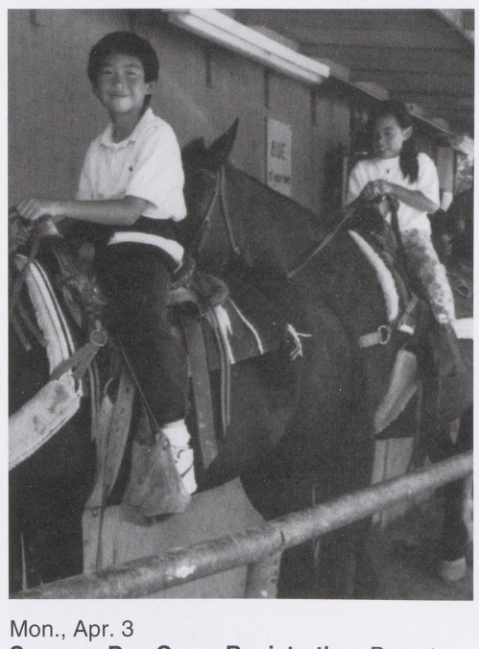
If you are thinking of switching Medicare supplemental insurance plans or choosing a supplemental policy, attend a free lecture on **Thurs., Mar. 16,** from 2-4 p.m. to find out about important changes relating to Medicare. The Mount Zion Care Account is a free membership program providing discounted health care services for adults ages 65 and older who qualify. Sponsored by UCSF/Mount Zion Center on Aging. Rm. 552, 5 North, UCSF/Mount Zion, 1600 Divisadero. Call 750-4125 for a reservation and information.

AIDS Programs

The UCSF AIDS Health Project offers a variety of free support groups for residents of San Francisco, including groups for people with AIDS, asymptomatic HIV+, HIV+ African-American heterosexual men, HIV- with AIDS-related concerns, and caregivers. They also offer drop-in groups for HIV+ and PWA, monthly disability workshops, social events for HIV+ and HIV- and a meditation and self-help group. The Project also provides free individual risk assessments & referrals. For more information, an intake interview for a particular group or an appointment for a risk assessment, call 476-3902.

Outdoors Unlimited

Outdoors Unlimited is a cooperative resource center for outdoor recreation and adventure, serving both the UCSF campus and the general public. New location: Basement of the UCSF Library, 530 Parnassus. Call 476-2078 for a free brochure. Welcome to Outdoors Unlimited Presentation: **Tues., Apr. 25,** at 7:30 p.m.



Mon., Apr. 3
Summer Day Camp Registration. Parents may begin to register their children ages 6-13 for this traveling day camp. Kids travel to Bay Area sites for guided explorations, hands-on tours, fun and games. The two-week sessions begin Mon., June 19, run 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and cost $250-$410. Register at Millberry Fitness Center, 500 Parnassus. Call 476-0417 for details.

Wed., Apr. 19-Wed., Apr. 26
Cross Country Ski Equipment Sale. 40%-60% off local retail. UCSF Library basement, 530 Parnassus. Call 476-2078.

Cole Hall Cinema

Films are shown on Thursdays and Fridays in Cole Hall, enter through 513 Parnassus. Prices run $2 to $3.50. Sponsored by Millberry Arts & Performances. Call 476-2542 for April shows. (Movies subject to change.)

Mar. 2 at 5:45 & 8:30 p.m.
Mar. 3 at 6:30 & 9:15 p.m.
Quiz Show

Mar. 9 at 5:45 & 7:45 p.m.
Mar. 10 at 6:30 & and 8:30 p.m.
The Little Mermaid

Mar. 31 at 6:30 p.m.
See Women's History Month events

Great Expectations Programs for Parents

The UCSF Birth Center offers classes & video presentations for expectant parents on Wednesdays, 7-8:30 p.m. Rm. 326, Ambulatory Care Center, 400 Parnassus. Call 476-MOMS for information.

Mar. 15
Labor Support and Medication During Childbirth.

Apr. 19
Birth Alternatives: Adapting Home Birth Methods to Hospital Birth.

Brown Bag Lectures

Free lectures held weekly at noon on Wednesdays in Rm. 300, Health Sciences West, enter through 513 Parnassus (P); monthly on Thursdays in Rm. 125, UCSF/Mission Center Building (MCB), 1855 Folsom St.; and monthly on Tuesdays in Herbst Hall, UCSF/Mount Zion (MZ), 1600 Divisadero. Sponsored by Public Service Programs. Call 476-4394.

Mar. 1
See Women's History Month events. (P)

Mar. 8
Beyond Conventional Exercise. (P)

Mar. 15
AIDS in the 21st Century — Where We Are and Where We Need to Go. (P)

Mar. 16
See Women's History Month events. (MCB)

Mar. 21
See Women's History Month events. (MZ)

Mar. 22
Health Informatics: Computers in Health Care. (P)

Mar. 29
Traveling the Bay Area Backroads. (P)

Apr. 5
Nutrition to Grow Old By. (P)

Apr. 12
Going Native. How to integrate native plants into your landscape and garden. (P)

Apr. 13
Sports Medicine: From Injury to Recovery. (MCB)

Apr. 18
New Horizons in the Treatment of Lung Cancer. (MZ)

Apr. 19
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: Myths, Morals and Management. (P)

Apr. 26
Aged to Perfection. Discover strategies for disease prevention, wellness and longevity. (P)

At the Heart of It

At the Heart of It, a cardiac support group for heart patients experiencing fear, anxiety, confusion & stress, is facilitated by a cardiac social worker and a registered nurse. Meets at UCSF/Mount Zion, 1600 Divisadero. For further information call 885-7227.

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Senior Lecture Series

UCSF Medical Group/Seniority Plus presents the following free lectures on Mondays at 10 a.m. Call 476-0373 for more information.

Mar. 13
Communicating with Your Health Care Provider. Lakeside Presbyterian Church, 19th Ave. & Eucalyptus.

Apr. 10
Keeping Your Heart Healthy. Herbst Hall, UCSF/Mount Zion, 1600 Divisadero.

AWAKE

AWAKE (alert, well and keeping energetic) is a support and education group for people with sleep apnea and their families. The group meets the third Thursday of each month and features guest speakers on topics relating to sleep apnea, followed by time for socializing and support. Bring your CPAP equipment to have it checked by a homecare specialist. Sponsored by UCSF/Mount Zion Sleep Disorders Center. Next two meetings: **Thurs., Mar. 16** and **Apr. 20.** Call 885-7886 for more information.

Mount Zion Community Meetings

An ongoing series of meetings to keep the community apprised of activities of interest and to listen to neighborhood concerns. Next meeting: **Tues., Mar. 28.** Executive Board Rm., 2nd fl., UCSF/Mount Zion, 1600 Divisadero. 7 p.m. Call 476-3206.

Blood Donation

Tues., Apr. 11
Blood Drive. Blood may be given at Millberry Conference Center, 500 Parnassus. 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

You don't have to wait for a blood drive to give blood. You may donate any weekday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m., or Saturday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at UCSF's Blood Donor Center. For information & appointments call 476-6989.

Look Good, Feel Better

Expert advice on makeup, wigs and the use of turbans provided for people who have undergone chemotherapy or radiation. Held every other month in the 11 Long Solarium, Long Hospital, 505 Parnassus, and at UCSF/Mount Zion. Co-sponsored by the American Cancer Society and supported by the Donna Smith Fund. Call 476-1383 to preregister for Parnassus meetings, 885-3693 for UCSF/Mount Zion meetings.

Art Exhibits

Wed., Mar. 1-Wed., May 31
Costume Designs by Warren Travis. On display at the Faculty/Alumni House, 745 Parnassus. Open weekdays or by appointment. Call 476-4723. Opening reception for artist on Thurs., Mar. 9, from 5-7 p.m.

UCSF
University of California San Francisco
Public Affairs
3333 California Street, Suite 103
San Francisco, CA 94143-0462

When his multiple sclerosis returned, it did so with a vengeance.

He was nearly an invalid.

The flare-up of Charles Levinson's multiple sclerosis came two days before Thanksgiving. Because he was already so weakened by the disease that he literally could not carry his own weight, the latest assault on his nervous system threatened to rob him of whatever strength and self-command he had left. With no bladder control, and unable to lift his hand, make a fist, or even spread his fingers, he was admitted to the UCSF/Mount Zion Multiple Sclerosis Center.

Many in his condition wind up in a nursing home. But Charles, 46, with the aid of the center's staff, worked fiercely for six weeks to regain some function and independence. A week after the New Year, he was back home.

Charles is not as well as he wants to be — yet. A home care attendant comes to his San Francisco apartment in the mornings and evenings, but for most of the day he is on his own.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) attacks and destroys the protective nerve fibers — a fatty substance called myelin — that surround the brain and spinal cord. The resulting scars trigger neurological symptoms that vary in severity and duration for each person. Symptoms may include unusual fatigue, impaired vision, loss of balance, muscle weakness, spasms, problems with the bladder, bowel, sexual function and even paralysis. The cause of MS is not known, but it is believed to result from immune system dysfunction. An estimated 250,000 to 350,000 Americans have the chronic disease, which is found more in northern temperate climates and strikes women twice as often as men. There is no proven cure for MS, although some symptoms can be treated with drugs. Several experimental drugs to slow progression of MS are now under study, including many at UCSF. Twenty percent of MS patients require total assistance and are confined to a nursing home, but half have had the disease for more than 25 years and are able to lead normal lives. The rest, like Charles, remit, relapse and gradually lose function.

Charles' bout with MS began in New York in 1978 when he suffered what felt like a stroke. Sensations of weakness and numbness trickled through his body. Charles lost, but later regained, nearly all his vision in his right eye. A battery of examinations — including a hot bath immersion, strength tests, spinal tap and CAT scans — confirmed the diagnosis he dreaded.

The next eight years, which included a move to San Francisco, were good for Charles. Business at his adjusting firm was booming, and with MS in remission he felt healthy. He could play tennis, drive around town, and run up six flights of stairs to a client's office. But then some of the classic symptoms began to recur. First he needed one cane to walk, then two, and eventually a wheelchair. Some days became a struggle, and he was forced to reduce his work hours.

When the UCSF/Mount Zion MS Center opened in the fall of 1993, Charles asked his doctor to refer him to this first comprehensive program for MS treatment in Northern California. The Center's physicians, including his new neurologist Donald E. Goodkin, MD, had an international reputation for treating the potentially disabling disease. "I knew if I had any problem, the experts and most up-to-date treatments were right here," says Charles.

Since then, Charles has been hospitalized twice. Just prior to his most recent visit, emergency paramedics had to bring him in after he had fallen several times. Yet more than the doctors and medical treatment have helped pull him through. At the MS Center — where services range from physical and occupational therapy and bladder management to arranging home care — he credits everyone from the nurses to the housekeepers. "It's a finely-tuned team that works flawlessly to get people up and out as soon as they are sure they can function on their own," says Charles.

In addition to steroid medication to stem the flare-up of MS, he underwent twice-a-day physical and occupational therapy to regain strength and muscle control that would allow him to eat, brush his teeth and even work on his home computer. The psychosocial support helped, too.

Today he maintains a positive outlook, and his goals are more realistic than lofty. He accepts that he may not walk again, but wants to get back into a manual wheelchair instead of the motorized one that he hopes is only temporary. Before his recent relapse, he often wheeled his way from his South Beach home to the Opera Plaza and back — a nearly five-mile round-trip. "I'm working to be as independent as I can be."

—Andy Evangelista

(For more information, call the UCSF/Mount Zion MS Center at 885-7844.)

Tom Wachs

March/April 1995

To Our Neighbors

MS patient looks forward to an independent life

The latest information on stroke therapy and research

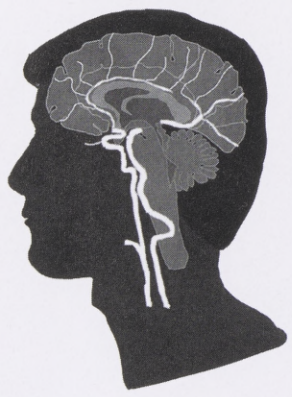
Ergonomics Lab is creating safer computer keyboards

UCSF
University of California San Francisco
3333 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94143-0462

To Our Neighbors

The latest on stroke research, treatment, prevention from UCSF

This year, 500,000 Americans will suffer a stroke, making it the third most common cause of death in this country and the second most common cause in women. Stroke often leaves its survivors with serious disabilities due to permanent brain damage.



Stroke, or "brain attack," results from an interruption of blood flow to a part of the brain caused by either a blocked or ruptured blood vessel. When this happens, the blood vessel is no longer able to bring oxygen and nutrients to the part of the brain it supplies. If the blockage lasts too long, this part of the brain may die. There are several possible symptoms of stroke depending on which part of the brain is injured. If the blockage lasts for only a few minutes, the symptoms come and go. This is called a transient ischemic attack or TIA. If they come and stay, it is called a stroke.

There are many causes of stroke, including narrowing of brain blood vessels from atherosclerosis (the same disease that causes heart attacks), debris that detaches from the heart or carotid arteries and lodges in a brain vessel, or when a vessel breaks open causing a brain hemorrhage.

But now, thanks to new research and treatment, many forms of stroke are preventable and treatable. A surge of knowledge of how stroke damages the brain cells has suggested new ways to treat patients in the critical first hours.

With the goal of providing the best possible care to stroke patients, UCSF has created a new Stroke Service, directed by neurologist Daryl R. Gress, MD. The service not only emphasizes acute treatment, but also diagnostic testing of patients at high risk for stroke, as well as rehabilitation of those who have suffered a stroke. The service draws on the expertise of neurologists, neurosurgeons, vascular surgeons and neurointerventional radiologists.

UCSF neurologists have been leaders in the effort to develop new treatments that aim to prevent oxygen-deprived cells from dying. These novel treatments — which range from antioxidant enzymes and neuroprotective drugs to the slight decrease of body temperature — mostly are based on blocking the toxic flood of calcium that swamps cells during trauma and stroke.

UCSF also is participating in trials to test the effectiveness of certain drugs to unblock the blood vessels that cause strokes. Such drugs already are being used for heart attack victims. One such study involves the drug pro-urokinase — a modified form of a naturally occurring enzyme that dissolves clots. UCSF is one of 30 medical centers in North America and one of the few sites on the West Coast participating in the trial.

Patients with symptoms of acute cerebral artery stroke admitted to UCSF are being screened for entry into the study. Those who are admitted within six hours after the onset of stroke symptoms, and who meet other study criteria are eligible to participate.

Are you at risk for stroke? If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or elevated blood cholesterol, or if you smoke, drink alcohol excessively or are obese, you may be at risk. Age also is a factor. More than 70 percent of stroke victims are aged 65 or older, and the risk of stroke doubles for every decade over age 55. Some risk factors are silent. Narrowing of the carotid arteries — major blood vessels in the neck that carry blood to the brain — may put you at substantial risk without any symptoms. Removing this blockage can reduce stroke risk by as much as 50 percent. Abnormal heart rhythms, especially atrial fibrillation, also may cause stroke. Certain medications are very effective in preventing stroke from these abnormal heart rhythms.

Most people don't know the signs of stroke, and by the time they seek help, sometimes it's too late to prevent serious brain damage. If you experience sudden weakness; numbness of the face, arm and leg on one side of the body; loss of speech, or trouble talking or understanding speech; unexplained dizziness; blurred or double vision; unsteadiness; temporary loss of vision in one eye; and sudden, severe headaches, you could be having a stroke, and should call 911 or your doctor immediately. If you have had a TIA or you have other stroke risk factors, talk with your doctor or the UCSF Stroke Service at 476-7489 to learn how to reduce your risks.

A free program on stroke will be held on Saturday, March 18, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. To attend, you must reserve space by calling 750-4109 by Friday, March 10. The program is co-sponsored by the UCSF Stroke Service and the UCSF/Mount Zion Center on Aging.

May is National Stroke Awareness Month. See the May/June issue of *To Our Neighbors* for more stroke events to be sponsored by UCSF.